



# Manual handling - overview

Work Health and Safety Directorate

Manual handling is any activity requiring a person to use any part of their muscular or skeletal system in their interactions with their workplace. It includes the use of force to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain any animate or inanimate object; repetitive actions and sustained postures.

WHS legislation specifies a number of risk factors to be eliminated or controlled through modifications to work practices or environment, provision of mechanical aids and training. In responding to identify manual handling risks, workplace managers are responsible for ensuring that injuries from manual handling tasks are prevented through implementing a documented risk management plan.

## Key steps

**Identify hazards** by listing activities and environments where hazards relating to manual handling may exist, e.g. positioning a student with a physical disability, moving a machine and the potential risks it poses by analysing injury records, consulting with employees and through direct observation. Check which of the following risk factors apply:

- Types of actions and movements such as repetitive actions, bending and reaching above shoulder height.
- Hazardous workplace and workstation layout.
- Working postures and positions which are awkward, constrained or prolonged.
- Duration, frequency and speed of manual handling.
- Location of loads and distances moved.
- Weights involved and forces required.

- Characteristics of loads and equipment making manual handling difficult or more strenuous.
- Work organisation and environment which reduce rest or increase strain.
- Presence of vibration.
- Personal factors including age, skills, experience, clothing and special needs which might make manual handling more strenuous.
- Any other relevant factors that might affect the risk of manual handling.

**Assess the risks** using the [risk assessment matrix](#) and the risk factors above. Determine the seriousness of the risks for each identified activity by considering both the likelihood of the risk to cause harm and how seriously a person could be harmed.

**Eliminate or control the risks** using the [hierarchy of controls](#). Develop suitable control strategies in consultation with employees and others undertaking work, including:

- Review work practices, systems of work and work environment to eliminate manual handling where possible.
- Where appropriate, provide and maintain mechanical lifting aids.
- Provide employees and others undertaking work with relevant information, instruction and training in manual handling techniques, correct use of mechanical aids and team lifting procedures if required.
- Develop safe work procedures.
- Erect signs where required to remind employees and others undertaking work of correct lifting techniques.

**Document plan** and retain as verification of the planning undertaken and to aid communication.

**Communicate plan** to employees and others undertaking work who need to know, and provide relevant information to students and others as appropriate.

**Monitor** effectiveness of controls and change if necessary.



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**Review** the risk assessment if an incident or significant change occurs.

## Further Information

[Safety Alert No 6, Front Lift Waste and Recycling Bins](#)  
[Hazardous Manual Tasks Code of Practice](#)

## Support materials

[Guidance in completing the risk management plan proforma: manual handling](#)  
[Risk management plan proforma](#)  
[Checklist for risk assessment of manual handling hazards](#)  
[Sample risk management plan: manual handling](#)  
[WHS Directorate](#)